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20 February 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: DC/OS/ALT/TR

SUBJECT : Inter-Cultural Communications Workshop

25X1A 1. On 13 February I attended a one-day Inter-Cultural Communications Workshop given by the Human Relations Research Organization of 300 North Washington Street, Alexandria. Attendance had been arranged by [REDACTED] for eight Agency officers, and the workshop administrator, Mr. Al Kraemer, gave us a condensed version of what is ordinarily a two-day presentation. The workshop is designed to give the participant insights into the cultural characteristics of many of his own ideas and behavior, on the theory that the better he understands the origins of his own views, the better will he be able to talk to people of other cultures.

2. The workshop is based on a series of short, video-taped extracts from conversations between persons of different cultures. The dialogues were winnowed out of many hours of role-playing conversations between seven Americans and a foreigner, who was variously Colonel Konda, Mr. Konda, Dean Konda, and the like, depending upon which of the Americans he was talking to. His cultural origins are never specified, although from appearance and speech he might be oriental, Latin American, Indonesian, or some other similar ethnic type. The dialogue units are shown one at a time, and after each one the group is asked to write down on a form what cultural characteristic the American is showing. The total collection of dialogues consists of 20 sequences, each of seven dialogue units, or a total of 140 excerpts.

3. Although the conversational exchanges were extracted from longer role-playing situations, these final exchanges are not from the original tapes. After selecting each portion, the producers rewrote the script for that portion and retaped it, cutting out distracting and extraneous material by this means; and most important of all they were able to give each of the units a sort of exponential curve of difficulty--that is, the particular American cultural characteristic becomes more and more obvious as each conversation progresses, until at the end the observer would have to be quite dense not to see the point. The administrator of the workshop can cut the conversation off at any point. By varying the length of the showing he allows to the participant, he can vary the subtlety of the demonstration to suit the analytical capabilities of any given group. A group of technicians, for example, who had spent most of their careers dealing with oil wells rather than people, might not

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recognize a cultural trait in the American until it had been demonstrated quite obviously and reacted to strongly by the non-American in the tape. On the other hand, a person trained in social sciences or psychology might require only the most subtle indications in order to spot culturally-generated attitudes. Mr. Kraemer says that the goal is to make the participant have to work to grasp the point, because he has found that the more a group has to work, the more it learns.

4. This system is the best one I have ever seen for improving the ability of Americans to deal with other people. It is not just an amusing demonstration of differences to be laughed at and forgotten. Instead, it forces the participant to look hard at attitudes that are kin to his own, to find out what they are and how they make him different from others.

5. A point which the administrator had great difficulty in impressing upon some of the participants was the absence of judgments about the characteristics being looked at. If the American discovers that he automatically thinks experiments are a better basis for learning than respect for authority and tradition, he has gained an important insight into how he will probably approach the problem abroad, but the workshop should not encourage him to judge whether his attitude is right or wrong. It is unlikely, of course, that a normal person is going to think his reactions are wrong and another person's right, but unless he can search for differences without seeking to reaffirm his own correctness and the other fellow's backwardness, he is not likely to improve his ability to talk to that other fellow.

6. Not only are judgments withheld, but emphasis is placed on finding the American's characteristics, not the foreigner's. For example, an American has almost no hesitation at all in talking about an emergency or contingency, such as death or flood or illness. It does not occur to him to think that words have a physical impact--that the uttering of words can physically cause things to happen. It is hard for an American even to imagine such a thing. In the world population, however, he is in a minority in this respect. Many peoples are disturbed by the utterance of words about their own death or that of friends or family, or about the possibility of earthquakes. The purpose of the workshop is to induce the participant to discover his own pragmatic attitude about these things, which puts him in the minority on this earth. Right or wrong do not enter into the process.

7. On the other hand, there is no thought in this workshop that the American must change his attitudes, or be hypocritical or apologetic about them in order to communicate effectively with non-Americans. Other peoples expect an American to think and act like one. His goal should be to recognize when his actions and attitudes are American rather than universal, rather than to be able to recognize how other peoples differ from some arbitrary American norm. Strangely enough, this limitation seemed to be the most difficult thing for some of the group to grasp.

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8. Mr. Kraemer stressed the overlapping feature of most human characteristics. No important characteristic is unique to Americans, but the goal is to find general areas of behavior which are American but not universal, although they may be shared in part by other peoples. Cultural characteristics are not neat packages.

9. Not the least valuable aspect of the workshop was to watch its impact on the Agency participants. Two of them were women, and one of these ladies seemed quite capable of grasping the content and was reasonably articulate about it, but she seemed so unsure of her own judgment that she made less of a contribution than she is probably capable of making. The other woman is a product of the French culture, with traces of accent in her speech, and she seemed to miss the point entirely. She could not reach the stage of looking for the what, because she was stuck on the why. Her reaction to a gap in communication between the two actors was to judge that one of them was right and the other wrong, and then to try to justify to the group her views about correct behavior. She can probably be an extremely charming lady in many situations, but she does not seem to have much talent for inter-cultural communications.

10. Another interesting participant was a gentleman who announced at the outset that he had a graduate degree in sociology, and would therefore be able to cope with the terminology and methodology without any difficulty. As it turned out, he fought the problem all the way. A most personable and likeable man, he nevertheless did not want to admit the validity of the cultural basis of a characteristic unless it was clearly unique to one culture. He could not see any value in learning to perceive that we are being typically American when we automatically accept experiments as being a good basis for learning, because he can point to other peoples who think the same way. He seemed oblivious to the fact that he, himself, was demonstrating Mr. Kraemer's thesis for the rest of the class better than the taped dialogues had done, but I think most of the rest of us were aware of it.

11. Although this presentation was done for a group, it would lend itself just as well to one-to-one tutorial teaching. To add it to our training capability we would have to order from HumRRO a set of the tapes and the printed material which goes with the tapes, and would have to arrange for certain of our officers to attend a three-day course which HumRRO gives for instructors who are going to administer the workshop.

12. Since the course can add an important element to our curriculum for any American assigned overseas, even an American who has already lived abroad for many years, I think we should equip ourselves to give it. I am therefore making up a written request for the procurement of the material and the arranging of the necessary training for some of our instructors.

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ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET

SUBJECT: (Optional)

Inter-Cultural Communications Workshop

FROM:

25X1A

EXTENSION

NO.

05 0042-73

DATE

TO: (Officer designation, room number, and building)

DATE

OFFICER'S INITIALS

COMMENTS (Number each comment to show from whom to whom. Draw a line across column after each comment.)

1. DC/OS/ALT/TR

22 Feb. *CH*

2.

3.

C/OS/TR

23/2/73 *CH*

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DC/OS/ST.

23 Feb *CH*

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John and I have discussed this at length and both of us believe it should be added to ALT Coverage, especially NOCAD.

CH

3-5 FYI - ALT has asked that 6 instructors be trained to administer this program - that OTR buy complete pkg. I imagine this will be done. You may want to have someone go to the training if & when held.